

'Organisations have a moral and legal responsibility  
to ensure that children are safe in their care.  
Child abuse is preventable!



# Choose With Care™

## 12 steps to a child safe organisation



Child Wise

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An introduction to the Choose With Care program  
Building Safer Organisations for Children

Child Wise is an Australian charity dedicated to protecting children everywhere. It is the only Australian based organisation working in Australia, Asia and the Pacific to prevent the sexual abuse and exploitation of children.

Child Wise implements programs that include participatory training workshops, capacity building initiatives, research and advocacy, community education, law reform and policy development.

Child Wise provides advice, support and resources to victims of child sexual abuse, individuals, parents, organisations and governments.

Child Wise is the Australian representative of ECPAT International, a global network of organisations working in 77 countries to prevent the sexual abuse and exploitation of children.

Contact Child Wise for further information and training details

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## What is Choose With Care?

Choose With Care is an innovative information and training program designed to assist organisations establish a safe environment for the children and young people in their care. It aims to deter, minimise and remove opportunities for abuse to occur in children's organisations and programs.

The Choose With Care program consists of a handbook, video and training workshops. It provides simple and practical child abuse prevention strategies, step-by-step guides, and models of best practice. The program is based on extensive research and consultation in Australia and internationally.

### Using this Booklet

This booklet introduces the principles of the Choose With Care program and the 12 steps to building a child safe organisation. The Choose With Care comprehensive handbook, video and training are available from Child Wise.



## Why Choose With Care?

The vast majority of people working with children are safe, but we now know that sex offenders will target child related organisations as a means of approaching children and young people. These offenders are very skilled at making friends and manipulating children, other adult carers and family in order to abuse and to cover their abuse.

The Victoria Police Child Exploitation Squad found that 43.5% of offenders they investigated in the period 1988 to 1996 gained access to child victims through children's organisations.

History has shown that children rarely speak out about abuse. How could you tell if abuse was occurring in your organisation? What would you do if you had suspicions of child abuse? Through awareness and action you can develop and implement effective prevention strategies and policies to minimise the risk of child abuse

**The Best Protection for Children is Prevention.**

## What is a Child Safe Organisation?

A child safe organisation is committed to protecting children in its care. It understands the nature and risks of child abuse and has an open and aware culture. Child abuse can be discussed and reported safely. Policies and procedures are developed to protect children and staff. Establishing and maintaining a child safe environment is the main consideration in all of its activities and management practices.

A child safe organisation will develop Child Protection Policy and procedures. It will put policy into practice, ensuring all service users and participants are aware of organisational policy and commitment to child protection. In an organisation with a culture of child safety, voicing a concern is not viewed as an accusation. Staff and volunteers will have confidence that their concerns will be dealt with professionally and confidentially.

## A child safe organisation will:

- be preventative rather than reacting to an unfortunate incident after it happens
- understand and act on the moral and legal imperatives of protecting children in their care
- acknowledge the damage an incident of abuse would do to the child, their family, people within and outside the organisation, as well as with the organisation itself
- introduce safeguards that will protect children, staff, volunteers and the organisation
- have clear boundaries of roles between staff and children
- be open to outside accountability
- have adequate staff, staff supervision and training
- recognise and act on children's rights
- know that the organisation is doing all that it can to protect children

Through awareness, consultation, education and action you can build a child safe organisation.

## 12 Steps to a child safe organisation





## STEP 1: Understand Child Abuse

Understanding child abuse is the first step in building a child safe organisation. To protect children in your care you need to know the potential risks and indicators of child abuse. It is only with this knowledge and understanding that you can develop effective child protection policies and child abuse prevention practices.

Child abuse includes physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Staff and volunteers need to have an understanding of all these forms. They need to learn about the nature of child abuse, and develop an awareness of how and why some children are victimised. By understanding the activities, relationships, inadequate procedures and environmental factors that potentially put children at risk, your organisation can act against them. It is important that all participants know what are appropriate and inappropriate behaviours in relationships with children. This will enable staff and volunteers to recognise dangerous situations and act before children are abused.

Your staff and volunteers also need to be aware of the indicators of possible child abuse and how to react, so they can respond appropriately to suspected abuse.

Child abuse can only be prevented when the causes and indicators of the problem are understood.

## STEP 2: Develop and maintain an open and aware culture

Child abuse thrives on secrecy. To prevent child abuse in your organisation you need to develop and maintain an open and aware culture. Staff, volunteers and children need to be aware of appropriate/inappropriate behaviour. They need to feel encouraged and safe to raise any concerns. If all participants are aware of child abuse and the organisation encourages open discussion and scrutiny, it becomes more difficult for abuse to occur and remain hidden.

Becoming child safe means creating an organisational environment where staff and children feel they can raise concerns and participants are aware of the risks and indicators of child abuse. Clear boundaries between staff and children need to be set. The organisation needs to be open to outside influence and accountability. Children's rights must be articulated and acted on. Communicating openly and honestly will assist children to speak up when something is worrying them.

- Listen** to children
- Believe** children
- Learn** about child abuse and protective behaviours for children and young people
- Teach** children about their rights and protective behaviour strategies
- Instil** a culture of safety and awareness into your organisation

## STEP 3: Identify and manage the risks and dangers to children in your programs and activities

Once your organisation is aware of how and why child abuse occurs you need to consider the risks to children in your organisation and programs. *Risk management is child abuse prevention.* You need to identify potential risks and ways children can be harmed in your organisation. Only by identifying risks can you develop strategies to minimise and prevent child abuse.

Risk means the potential for something to go wrong. Risk management means identifying the potential for an accident or incident to occur and taking steps to reduce the possibility of it occurring.

Risk management is a generic process that can be applied to the prevention of child sexual abuse.

Work with your staff and participants to ask

- What/how/why children in your organisation can be sexually abused?
- What are the dangers?
- What could go wrong?
- What are the consequences?
- How likely are they to occur?
- What controls such as policies, procedures, and strategies are in or should be in place?



## STEP 4: Develop a Child Protection Policy

Once your organisation has identified risks to children in your care you need to implement policies and procedures to address and minimise those risks. The framework is a Child Protection Policy.

A Child Protection Policy is a statement of your commitment to child safety and outlines the strategies of how the organisation will meet this commitment. It will provide guidance to the everyday practices and longer term work of your organisation. Your policy is also a way to describe your commitment to child protection. The role of policy is to provide principles, and to guide decisions and action on child protection issues. Everyone benefits from a Child Protection Policy that provides clear direction and a pre-planned uniform approach to issues that arise.

A Child Protection Policy should include:

- Your organisation's commitment to child protection
- Definitions of child abuse
- How to raise and report concerns
- Responsibilities to report
- Management responsibilities
- How your organisation will support: **Children** who have experienced abuse; **Staff** who have allegations made against them; **Parents** who have raised complaints or whose children have been abused; **Other participants** and workers affected by the situation

A Child Protection Policy is a living document.

You must ensure your practice is consistent with policy and regularly revised and updated.



## STEP 5: Create clear boundaries

A Code of Conduct (also known as a Code of Behaviour or Behaviour Protocol/guideline) is a central element of the Child Protection Policy and is a logical outcome of your risk management process. It clearly describes what are appropriate behaviours in relation to children within your organisation and in your activities. It sets out behaviours and clear boundaries for staff/volunteers/all participants that limit the risk of child abuse occurring in the organisation and provides direction for anyone working with children/young people.

### A Code of Conduct

- is a straightforward list of do's and don'ts for staff and volunteers
- minimises grey areas and highlights inappropriate behaviours
- lets everyone know the rules

Everyone should be aware of the Code of Conduct.

Keep it prominently displayed.

Regularly review your Code of Conduct so guidelines are up to date and working.

### It should address:

- Physical contact/touching
- Sign in/sign out procedures
- Respect for privacy
- Confidentiality
- Language
- Favouritism/'special' relationships
- Perceptions & appearances
- Out of hours contact
- Discipline
- Cultural sensitivity
- Adult/child ratios
- Sleeping arrangements
- Reporting concerns
- Toilet and bathing arrangements

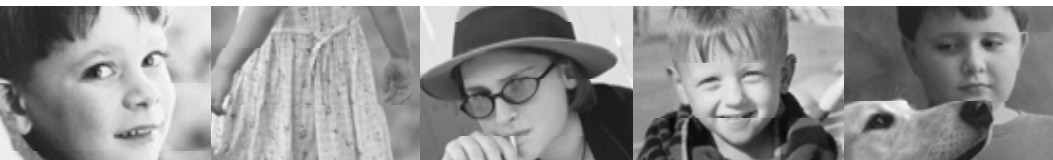
## STEP 6: Adopt best practise in recruitment & selection

To be child safe, children's organisations need to employ the best applicants for both paid and unpaid positions. Use the recruitment and selection process to attract positive role models for children and people who will embrace the child protection principles of your organisation. Children's organisations also need to be vigilant in their recruitment and selection of staff and volunteers to reduce the risk of employing unsuitable people. Child sex offenders will target organisations that are unaware of the risks and dangers of child abuse and who conduct little or no screening. Organisations need to adopt a structured and systematic approach to recruitment and selection for all staff and volunteers.

To Choose With Care your organisation needs to:

- Develop key selection criteria
- Be careful of the messages you give when recruiting staff
- Aim to attract positive role models
- Give reliable information about the position
- Plan and prepare for employment interviews
- Use behavioural and situational questions in interviews
- Ask the difficult questions
- Check job knowledge
- Watch for red flags and warning signs in interviews
- Conduct reference checks
- Conduct police checks
- Use several selection tools
- Train staff in recruitment and selection





## STEP 7: Screen all staff and volunteers

Organisations should screen ALL staff and volunteers as part of its recruitment and selection process. Insufficient screening is a risk factor which could allow child abuse to occur in your organisation by the placement of a child sex offender or otherwise unsuitable candidate. Advertised screening procedures are also a way to maintain an open and aware culture.

### Before offering an applicant a position you should:

- always conduct reference checks
- check two forms of identification
- ask for a verified academic transcript of qualifications or check details with the educational institution
- carefully look at the applicant's employment history and seek explanations (e.g. travel, study leave) for any gaps. An application form that asks for a detailed work history including months and years removes uncertainty
- conduct a police check (criminal history check).

## STEP 8: Support and supervise staff and volunteers

To build and maintain a child safe organisation you need to ensure staff and volunteers are well supported and supervised. This will minimise the opportunity for child abuse and promote child protection policies and procedures.

Experience shows that child abuse is more prevalent in organisations that lack regular, formal supervision and performance monitoring. Even with the greatest vigilance, offenders may still gain entry to your organisation. The supervision of staff is necessary, not only to prevent and detect child abuse, but also to improve the quality of your services and strengthen the organisation. Regular formal supervision is also a hallmark of good human service management practice and it should be a mandatory part of a person's employment. Staff support and supervision should start from the very first day of a person's employment with a period of orientation and induction.

A child safe organisation will have an open and aware culture where all participants feel responsible for the protection of children in their program. The approachability and supportiveness of managers is essential.



## STEP 9: Ensure there is a clear complaints procedure for reporting concerns

An effective reporting procedure strengthens the effort towards a child safe organisation. Child abusers are less likely to remain in an environment where workers are trained to report inappropriate behaviour. Child abusers thrive on secrecy and are more likely to commit an abusive act when they are in an environment in which other staff members are naïve, insensitive, and unresponsive to the possibility of child abuse. Having clear reporting guidelines is an important part of maintaining an open and aware culture.

A reporting procedure outlines how the organisation will manage complaints and/or allegations of misconduct against a staff member, volunteer, or service user. It helps convince participants that their concerns will be acted on appropriately and fairly. A reporting procedure ensures all complaints/concerns are managed in a uniform manner.

Physical and/or sexual abuse of a child is a crime. Organisations must notify authorities when there are reasonable grounds for reporting abuse. It is not appropriate for an organisation to decide whether abuse has taken place or not. All concerns must be acted upon immediately.

## STEP 10: Know your legal responsibilities

Children's organisations have a legal and moral responsibility to protect children in their care. Child safe organisations need to be aware of their legal responsibilities to ensure that all legal requirements are met.

Organisations providing services to children and young people are increasingly facing legal action for abuse of children in their care. They can also face legal action over their response to allegations of child abuse. In addressing allegations of child abuse the organisation needs to prove that they have taken "all reasonable steps" (doing as much as possible) to prevent any abuse.

Organisations may be held liable for failure to prevent "foreseeable" abuse. An organisation's failure to take "reasonable steps" to prevent abuse may be construed as a contributing factor to the abuse. A claim of negligence may then be made for breach of "duty of care".



## STEP 11: Empower children and encourage their participation in your program

Abuse is more common in organisations where children have no voice. To be child safe your organisation needs to empower children so they can speak their concerns. In building and maintaining a child safe environment we need to include and value the unique knowledge and experience of children and young people. Children and young people can identify strengths, weaknesses, risks and dangers in activities that may otherwise go undetected. Children's participation can mean that more risks are identified, the open and aware culture is expanded, and children feel safe to report abuse.

If children are consulted in decision making around your child protection policies and strategies they:

- will be more committed to the policies and procedures
- will gain a greater understanding of policies and procedures
- will gain skills to speak up for themselves
- will be better able to recognise dangers and risks and seek support and assistance.



## STEP 12: Provide education and training for all participants

Education and training are fundamental tools in building a child safe organisation. Whether you are implementing new programs and policies or reinforcing existing ones, all staff, volunteers, children and their families should be informed and educated. This is another component of developing an open and aware culture and ensuring your risk management policies and procedures are widely understood and implemented. If participants do not know what to do, they will not be able to prevent child abuse.

Training programs and education for staff and volunteers will reduce fear, suspicion and resistance to change. Training should be regarded as an important investment for every organisation as it improves the skills of staff and the quality of service. It is a necessary component of good management and should be provided to all staff, volunteers and participants. Training should be institutionalised in the organisation and conducted regularly.

## Further Information

The 12 steps to a child safe organisation are fully explained in the Choose With Care handbook. This will give you a comprehensive guide to developing and implementing child protection and child abuse prevention policies/procedures. It includes models and checklists that can be applied to your organisation. The Choose With Care Handbook is available from Child Wise.

Child Wise also offers advice and training on the issues discussed in Choose With Care. Workshops can be designed specifically to meet your organisation's needs. Contact Child Wise for further information and training details.

Child Wise welcomes your feedback. Contact the Child Wise office to share your experiences. We continue to collect examples of best practice in the interests of protecting children everywhere.

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Child Wise continues to build the award winning Choose With Care program to assist organisations to provide safer services for children. We have established the Choose With Care Help Desk which can:

- Assist you to develop, implement and maintain your child safe practices
- Conduct, **Child Protection Audits** compiling a risk assessment of your existing policies and practices in consultation with staff and volunteers. A report will be provided to your organisation detailing the analysis and outlining recommendations for the development and implementation of further policies and practices aiming to strengthen your child safe environment.
- **Develop your Policies and Procedures** by meeting with your staff to determine what should be included in your child protection or child safety policy. A first draft of the policy is prepared for your feedback. A final policy is then developed. Child Wise can also assist with implementation of the policy and staff and volunteer training as part of this process.
- Provide your **Crisis Management/Debriefing** during and/or following critical incidents. Further, we can provide consultation in relation to concerns about a child, staff member or volunteer at your service
- Provide **specialist training** based on your child protection learning needs.

Our Help Desk is contactable on 1800 99 10 99  
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Child Wise is an Australian charity working to protect children everywhere. Donations to Child Wise are tax deductible

